

Conference Abstract

Data Detectives - The Backlog Cataloguing Project at Auckland War Memorial Museum

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Abstract

The Collection Access and Readiness Programme (CARP) is a unique, well-defined programme with committed funding at Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM). In the Natural Sciences department, CARP has funded the equivalent of five positions over five collecting areas for four years. These are filled by six part-time collection technicians and a senior full-time manager. As Collection Technicians, our role, across Botany, Entomology, Geology, Marine, and Palaeontology, is to digitise acquisitions prior to December 2012. We are processing the backlogs of our collections, which are prioritised across all museum activities in distinct taxonomic projects. The cataloguing method involves gathering and verifying all available information and entering data into Vernon, our collections management system (<https://vernonsystems.com/products/vernon-cms/>), with specifically designed record standards aligned to Darwin Core (Wieczorek et al. 2012).

CARP has allowed us the freedom to explore backlog collections, some of which have not been fully processed, revealing mysteries that would otherwise have sat undiscovered, and to resolve uncertainties across the collections. For example, in Botany, cataloguing the foreign ferns reveals previously unrealised type specimens; in Marine, cataloguing all 9117 specimen lots of the New Zealand *Bivalvia* collection, brought classification and locality data uncertainties to resolution. There are multiple projects running concurrently in each collecting area, continually enriching our collection data. In turn, this is opening up a far

wider range of information to the public through our online collection portal, AWMM Collections Online <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/discover/collections-online> (currently 800,000 records). Open accessibility promotes careful consideration of how and what data we deliver, as it is disseminated through global portals, such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) and Atlas of Living Australia (ALA).

Collections that have often had no more attention than recording of their original labels, have interesting stories beyond “just” cataloguing them. As cataloguers, we have found that the uncertainties or sometimes apparent lack of detail increases our engagement with our collections. Rather than solely copying information into the database, we become detectives, resolving uncertainties and verifying the background of our objects, collection sites and collectors. This engagement and the global reach of our data mean that we are invested in the programme, so that data entry continuity and accuracy are maximised. Our presentation will give an overview of the CARP and our method, and a look at our progress two years in, highlighting some of our discoveries and how the uncertainty in our data allows us to engage more with our collections.

Keywords

collections, data, cataloguing, backlog, open access, engagement

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References

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